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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001510

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (DATES, PARA 1, 2 AND 5)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/09/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MARR](#) [FR](#) [EUN](#) [NATO](#) [FRPREL](#) [EUN](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: SOME MOD THINKING ON NATO, DARFUR, AND ARM SALES
TO VENEZUELA

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, Reason 1
.4 B/D

11. (S) Summary: In a March 8 meeting, senior MOD officials affirmed that the French Government has embargoed arms sales to Venezuela, although the decision may still not be final. On Darfur, France is not opposed to a NATO assistance role, but officials cautioned that the West, whether NATO or EU, will need to carefully manage relief efforts, given African resistance to a Western presence. MOD officials also expressed satisfaction with existing NATO operations in Afghanistan (ISAF) and in the Balkans, but they worry that NATO might consider an early withdrawal in Kosovo. Defense Minister Alliot-Marie, who had planned a Washington visit early in 2006 is now tentatively looking at a late May or June travel date to Washington and possibly other sites in the United States. End Summary.

Defense Minister to Chile and U.S.

12. (C) On March 8, DATT and Embassy Pol/miloff met with Captain Yves Joli, Deputy Director of the Defense Ministry's Military Cabinet, and LtCOL Denis Millot, North America desk officer in the MOD's Strategic Affairs directorate. In a free flowing tour d'horizon discussion, Joli confirmed Defense Minister Alliot-Marie's attendance at the March 11 inauguration of Chile's new President Bachelet, as well as Alliot-Marie's request for a short pull aside with Secretary Rice. He thought the meeting would be useful to touch on French-U.S. cooperation in the region (Haiti-Venezuela), maritime drug interdiction efforts, and transatlantic relations, to include at NATO and the EU. Alliot-Marie would be prepared to also broach Iran and other middle-east issues, time permitting.

13. (C) Joli also noted that Alliot-Marie's original plan to travel to the United States early in 2006 had evolved. She is now looking at going to Washington in the late May, June timeframe. In addition to meetings in Washington, the MOD is also seeking speaking opportunities for her elsewhere in the United States, possibly to include the West coast.

Sub sales to Venezuela are off, for now

14. (S) In response to Pol/Miloff's question on the status of French arms sales to Venezuela, including possible submarine sales, Joli stated that President Chirac--for now--had put a hold on all arms exports to Venezuela. Joli volunteered his personal view that it was unfortunate that helicopter sales were affected by this ban; they were less of a threat to the United States in the region.

15. (S) In a separate March 9 conversation with Col Millot, he explained that the Prime Minister's office, which oversees arms export controls, recently had issued instructions that all arms exports to Venezuela were to be "frozen." Expanding on Joli's March 8 comments, Millot said that he had heard, but not seen any written instructions, that President Chirac had stated that "he did not want to see any submarine sales to Venezuela." (Comment: This was the first time we have heard in such emphatic terms that submarine sales were off, at least for now. In our previous discussions with GoF officials, they had indicated merely that sub sales was only at a very preliminary stage of discussion. End comment)

No intrinsic opposition to NATO in Darfur

16. (C) As the conversation turned to NATO, Joli and Millot pointed to President Chirac's recent phone conversation with the President, in which he reportedly confirmed that France was not opposed in principle to a NATO assistance role in Darfur. Joli, however, very emphatically cautioned that the West would have to be careful in how we handled our relief efforts. Notwithstanding the great humanitarian need in the region, it was telling that the AU had still not asked either NATO or the EU for assistance. He ventured an often-stated French view that Africans are hesitant to allow a Western presence in the region. Additionally, we will need to deal with Sudan, which is clearly trying to block the rehatting of AMIS, Joli noted.

Support for ISAF and NATO in Kosovo
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[17.](#) (C) Reviewing the state of play at NATO, Joli reiterated France's opposition to a broader role for the Alliance, lest it become "a super OSCE." Joli affirmed that NATO should play to its strengths as a military alliance and not seek additional roles, such as the humanitarian relief operation in Pakistan. A key problem is that Alliance members are not keen on committing resources, he added. Joli complained how, whether in the EU or at NATO, and except for the British, France's European partners are not dedicating sufficient resources to defense and security needs. He cited low defense budgets, in terms of percentage of GDP, as an example of Europe's failing.

[18.](#) (C) Joli and Millot expressed the MOD's full support for ISAF, as well as for NATO's contributions to security and stability in the Balkans. Joli indicated that, over time, Europe would clearly have to carry a greater share of responsibility for the Balkans. He cautioned, however, that NATO should not disengage from Kosovo too rapidly. He looked forward to increased NATO-EU cooperation in the Balkans.
EU role in handling decommissioned ships

[19.](#) (C) Joli said the decision to have France's former aircraft carrier, the Clemenceau, towed back to France had been difficult. Aside from the controversy raised by environmentalists, the underlying problem remained that Europe does not have any ship yards where old ships could be dismantled. France therefore has suggested to the EU that it consider setting up such a facility for the decommissioning and dismantling of old ships. (Background Note: In advance of his visit to India, President Chirac reversed a government decision to send the Clemenceau to India for dismantling. The sale of the ship for scrap had generated much controversy and legal opposition from environmentalists in France and India. End note.)

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Stapleton